

LOCAL NEWS

Reporter-News team proves un-bee-table at spelling event



photos by Thomas Metthe/Reporter-News Members of The Woe BEE-tides team, Mike Sadler (from left), Kelly Thompson and Bruce Lampert react after missing a word Tuesday during the Spell Abilene! spelling bee benefiting the Adult Literacy Council at the downtown Abilene Public Library.

By Scott Kirk, Special to the Reporter-News

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The Reporter-News broke a 20-year drought Tuesday night, winning the 26th annual Spell Abilene! adult spelling bee at the Abilene Public Library.

The team of Janet Van Vleet, Tim Chipp and Tim Ritter outlasted nine other teams, including four from other media, in the annual

event that raises money for the Adult Literacy Council in Abilene.

The winning word was "gesundheit," which Van Vleet spelled correctly in a sudden-death spell-off. After three championship rounds, the bee was decided by which team could correctly spell a word the quickest.

Van Vleet said she was certain about the spelling of "gesundheit." In fact, she also was certain about the spelling of "tambourine," but her teammates weren't as sure, so the team passed on the word.

"I had tambourine right, but they didn't believe me," she said.

Marilyn Flournoy, president of the Adult Literacy Council in Abilene, said the addition of the sudden-death component was made to eliminate a drawn out back-and-forth between the last two teams.

"That just makes it more fun," she said.

The first time a team from the Reporter-News won the event was in 1996, when Jerry Reed, Rebecca Harris and Linda Murray defeated 15 other teams. That year, the winning word was "bucentaur," a ceremonial Venetian boat.

The rules were changed slightly this year to incorporate the sudden-death event. When the teams were weeded down to three, the teams had to use letter cards to spell 10 words, with one point going to the team that spelled each word the quickest. That eliminated the team from the Abilene Public Library, perhaps proving that there was no home-field advantage.

For the next three rounds, the teams from the Reporter-News and First Financial Bank squared off. The Reporter-News had a chance to win in the second round of the championship round after First Financial misspelled "edelweiss." However, the Reporter-News missed on "frankincense" to keep the bee going.

The teams then both spelled "myrrh" and "strychnine" correctly to set up the dramatic finish.

This year's bee moved faster than previous events, with three teams going out in the opening round on "fettuccine," "daiquiri" and "vermicelli" despite the fact that each team had at its disposal a lifeline to the top three finishers at this year's Big Country Spelling Bee.

The teams also could also use a "stinger," with which they could pass a word to another team, and a "buzz off," which allows a team to effectively kill a word it doesn't want to spell. Thus, the team from La Voz 93.3 FM wiggled out of spelling "gerrymander" and the library team dodged spelling "saccharine."

The buzz off didn't always work out as planned, however. One of the two teams from First Financial passed on "culottes" only to get eliminated on "peignoir."

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